

# Scrawny Elephant Seized At Circus

He was about a ton underweight, says the sanctuary that took him in.

By TOM BRENNAN  
tbrennan@tampatrib.com

BALM — A 21-year-old Asian male elephant is adapting to a temporary home in Tennessee after federal authorities confiscated him over the weekend from a Balm-based circus.

Ned the elephant arrived Sunday at The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee. Officials with the U.S. Department of Agriculture took him from trainer Lance Ramos on Saturday after they determined Ned was drastically underweight.

Carol Buckley, executive director of the sanctuary, said Ned weighed 7,500 pounds, about a ton less than he should.

"He is curious and quite attentive," she said. "But it breaks our hearts to see how timid and fearful he is."

She said the plan is to put weight on Ned "in a slow, methodical manner."

"He is one of the lucky ones: He is about to cross over from the entertainment industry to a sanctuary," she said.

Ramos said Ned suffers from a stomach ailment and the animal "can't take in a whole lot of food." U.S. Department of Agriculture officials acted in a "drastic" manner when Ned was taken away from him, Ramos said.

"I felt like a criminal," he said. "I just love the elephant. I enjoyed spending time with it, handling it, taking care of it."

Ramos has had other run-ins with federal authorities before about his care of animals.

Investigators charged Ramos last year with a number of violations, most dealing with the way he handled his animals. Ramos has appealed and the case is pending.

A female elephant, apparently startled while grazing, attacked and killed Ramos' sister, Teresa Ramos-Caballero, in 2000. Ramos was charged with violating state wildlife rules.

The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals on Monday asked federal authorities to pursue criminal charges against Ramos, whose federal license lists him as Lance-lot Kollmann.

Reporter Tom Brennan can be reached at (813) 259-7698.